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METLAKAHTLA

BY

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SITKA, ALASKA

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METLAKAHTLA.

Men seem to find small interest in that which is being made, in that which is in process, in the unfinished. It is that which is complete, an end, a result, which attracts interest and brings forth the question, who did it, and, how was it done? Metlakahtla is a problem solved—at least partially—a theory proved, a Christian's belief lived, and it therefore attracts to itself the attention of the student of sociological problems as well as the interest of the missionary, and of those who have the welfare of the world near their hearts.

As has been true in all great movements, the history of the movement is the history of one man. Mr. Wm. Duncan is the one man. Before Mr. Duncan there was no Metlakahtla. After him—no one can at present foresee or dares prophesy as to the fate of the colony.

Wm. Duncan was born in 1831 and his early days were spent in Beverly, Yorkshire. Today, though in his seventy-sixth year, and after fifty years of virtual exile among a heathen people, he tells tales of his school days, giving names of schoolmates and teachers, tales which reveal his tenacious memory as well as his masterful nature even as a boy. While still a youth he entered a wholesale house where he soon became a valued salesman. He was a member of the Church of England and moreover was possessed of a mind severely practical, yet intensely religious. As a result of this latter tendency his whole nature rose in ready response to an ardent appeal for missionaries which he heard at a quarterly missionary meeting, and he was accepted by the Church Missionary Society and placed in the Highbury Training School.

Just at this time, 1856, Capt. J. C. Prevost, Master of H. M. S.

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"Virago," which had been cruising the waters between Victoria and Fort Simpson, endeavoring to quiet and quell the fierce Indian tribes in the region about Queen Charlotte Islands, returned to England. Capt. Prevost was as "thorough a Christian as he was valiant a commander," and while in London wrote an able article on the land and people of the North Pacific Coast, making a most earnest plea that missionaries be sent to these Indians, who had so deeply interested him by their "highly intelligent character, manly bearing, and physical appearance," in spite of their wildness and fierceness. This plea of the Captain was responded to generously. Among other gifts was \$2,500 for the work among the Red Men of the North Pacific Coast. Yet eleven days before the ship returned to Fort Simpson still one link in this wonderful chain of work was lacking. There were probably 60,000 natives without a teacher, helper, or missionary. There was money and a ship ready for a worker. But there was no man to go. The young Duncan at the Training School was at last selected and even when he understood the dangers and difficulties of the field he gladly offered his life for the work. December 22, 1856, the man-of-war "Satellite" steamed out of the harbor for her voyage of twenty thousand miles around Cape Horn. After six months of braving the sea and storm Victoria was reached.

Here, the officials of the Hudson Bay Company refused to let Mr. Duncan venture among the Indians around Fort Simpson, feeling assured his life would be taken at once. They urged his remaining at Victoria and working among the natives there. Again Mr. Duncan's Napoleon will was made evident. It has always been characteristic of the man that whenever he sets out in pursuit of an end that he knows is right and worthy of pursuit he is not to be deterred. After much

discussion, when asked by the Governor: "Do you still persist in wishing to go northward?" he answered: "I cannot possibly entertain any change of my plans. I have been assigned to Fort Simpson, and cannot work elsewhere without first consulting with the Society in London, which would take a year's time. If you will permit me to go, all I will ask of you and the Hudson Bay Company is that I be given the protection of the Fort until I can speak the native language. Then I will take the risk of going out among the Indians without involving the Company in any further responsibility." To this the Governor replied: "You shall go and I will give instructions to the Fort to treat you as one of the officers. The only condition being that you do not call the Indians within the Fort for any meeting."

As steamers went to Fort Simpson only twice a year, Mr. Duncan waited in Victoria for the fall steamer and in September embarked for his final five hundred miles and his new work. An old man now living at Metlakatla, a mere boy when Mr. Duncan arrived thus described to me his coming:

"People all hear white man come. White man bring God's letter. White man see Indian's heart. Find out good man or bad man. Indians glad he come. Big ship come night, eight o'clock. Ship stay out, far out. Canoes, many canoes go out. All Indians on beach. Glad to see white man who had God's letter. He come. Go to Fort. Indians all glad."

The Fort, including dwellings, workshops, store houses and trading stores, was enclosed by a stockade one hundred yards square and twenty feet high. At the corners were bastions mounted with cannon. The entire garrison was less than twenty persons, while the Indians in the immediate vicinity numbered thousands, so the greatest caution was

exercised, and never more than two or three Indians admitted at one time.

Mr. Duncan immediately began the study of the Tsimpsen language, having secured good, faithful old Clah, who became his helper, friend, and defender, as well as his teacher, though he could speak no English. He selected from the dictionary fifteen hundred of the commonest English words and by means of signs and ingenious methods secured their Tsimpsen equivalents. Mr. Duncan says he had more difficulty in learning "then," "addah," than any other word.

Afterwards he formed eleven hundred short sentences. Eight long months were spent in acquiring so much of the language. Long months they were, indeed, for he says there was not a man at the Fort who had any interest in common with himself, and many were the days when he exchanged not even a word with the white men.

Not long after Mr. Duncan's arrival he received a noteworthy visit from one of the Tsimpsen Indians. He came to ask what 1858 meant, and when told it meant 1858 years since Christ came to earth to show men how they might be saved from sin, the Indian exclaimed: "Why didn't you tell us this before?" To this Mr. Duncan had no answer. He was face to face again with that unanswerable question: if the church really believes it has a message, why has it allowed the centuries to roll away with countless millions of all races passing away ignorant of the existence of a Gospel. Again the Indian asked: "Have you God's letter?" And when shown a Bible he reverently touched it and asked: "Is this God's letter?" Being assured it was, he inquired: "And has He sent it to us, the Tsimpsens?" Mr. Duncan replied: "He sent it to you just as much as to me." "Are you going to tell the Indians that?" was the next query, and being assured that

that was his purpose, the Indian looked relieved and said: "Am, Am, good, that is good," and he spread the good news through the camp.

Mr. Duncan tells of seeing many weird and horrible sights in these first days. Shortly after his arrival he saw hundreds fleeing to the beach and their canoes. A party of frenzied, naked medicine men and their followers were madly searching for somebody to tear to pieces and use in their horrible orgies, and the first man they met would be their victim. A slave who had been killed that morning was found on the beach and her body torn apart by hands and teeth and carried away by the howling, shrieking maddened men. The inhumanity to their slaves, and the belief in witchcraft leading to unbelievable tortures of the witch, caused many a heart ache for the earnest teacher. Add to these barbarous customs the white man's fire water which, against all law, was sold to the Indians, and which made them far more fiendish than did even their own wild practices, and the horrors and dangers and difficulties of the work can be imagined.

Yet as soon as Mr. Duncan could speak a little of the native tongue he began leaving the Fort and visiting the Indians. Everywhere he was greeted with "Shinaugut," "Chief"; everywhere treated with all consideration. The Tsimpsen word for God is "Shinaugut Lakkah," meaning the Great Chief above. When Mr. Duncan sent word that he was ready to tell them God's message, the Chiefs' houses were made ready for him. There were nine divisions in the Tsimpsen tribe around the Fort, each having its own chief, Legaic being the Chief of all the Chiefs.

It was with fear and trembling that Mr. Duncan began his first prayer and first talk; fear lest he should not be able to make his precious message clear enough to interest the Indians, for so much depended

on their first impression. He spoke in each of the chief's houses, speaking to about nine hundred people that first day. In every house the Indians gave the closest attention and willingly knelt during prayer, when asked to do so. Mr. Duncan's magnetism, earnestness, and forcefulness made itself felt from this first effort. He started a school in one of the chief's houses, teaching the children in the morning and the adults in the afternoon and evening. In an incredibly short time he had a following numbering several of the chiefs.

July 26, 1861, fourteen men, five women and four children were baptised and received into the church, the first to be publicly received.

A new question was engrossing Mr. Duncan's attention. Finally he wrote to the Board: "What is to become of the children and the young people under instruction, when temporal necessity compels them to leave school? If they are permitted to slip away from me into the gulf of vice and misery, which everywhere surrounds them, the fate of these tribes is sealed, and the labor and money that has already been spent for their welfare might as well have been thrown away. The well-thinking part of the Indian people themselves see this, and are asking, nay, craving, a remedy. The head chief of one tribe is constantly urging this question upon me, and begs that steps may be taken which shall give the Indians that are inclined, and especially the children now being taught, a chance and a help to become what good people desire them to be."

The best remedy seemed to be a colony, where the converts might be free from the temptations, taunts and vices of their friends. The beautiful island of Metlakahla, whose musical name means "Inlet of the Open Sea," seventeen miles from Fort Simpson was chosen. There had been an ancient Tsimpsan village there and moreover there was a

fine harbor, good fishing and hunting grounds, and good soil for gardening.

Mr. Duncan made known his plan, which was warmly approved by the natives, but he required all who wished to join the colony to sign the following rules:

1. To give up "Ahlied," or Indian devilry.
2. To cease calling in "Shamans," or medicine men when sick.
3. To cease gambling.
4. To cease giving away their property for display.
5. To cease painting their faces.
6. To cease indulging in intoxicating drinks.
7. To rest on Sabbath.
8. To attend religious instruction.
9. To send their children to school.
10. To be cleanly.
11. To be industrious.
12. To be peaceful.
13. To be liberal and honest in trade.
14. To build neat houses.
15. To pay the village tax.

May 27, 1862, six large canoe loads bade farewell to relatives, old friends, customs, and habits and faced the new and unknown, trusting implicitly in their able leader. Rapidly the colony grew to five hundred and then a thousand. A church, similar to the one in the present Metlakahla, was built. A school house and mission, store, cannery, sawmill, and soap factory was started and the new colony flourished financially as well as spiritually.

Mr. Duncan was appointed magistrate by the Canadian govern-

ment with authority for hundreds of miles up and down the coast, and so carefully did he and his constables (natives) guard the ports that the smuggling of liquor to the Indians was virtually stopped. As a result such enmity was aroused against Mr. Duncan that he could get no boat to carry goods either to or from Victoria and he was forced to buy a schooner. This the Indians called "Kahak" or Slave, since it did the work and they reaped the profits. He fined and imprisoned several liquor dealers and burned one of their schooners. In revenge the owner fitted out another liquor carrying craft and christened it "Duncan." Conditions on the island are best described in his letter to the governor, Sir James Douglas:

"To many who have joined me, the surrendering their national and heathen customs performed over the sick—ceasing to give away, tear up, or receive blankets, etc., for display, dropping precipitately their demoniacal rites, which have hitherto and for ages filled up their time and engrossed all their care during the months of winter; laying aside gambling, and ceasing to paint their faces—had been like cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye. Yet I am thankful to tell you that these sacrifices have been made.

"On New Year's day the male adult settlers came cheerfully forward to pay the village tax, which I had previously proposed to levy yearly, viz.: one blanket, or two and one-half dollars, of such as have attained manhood, and one shirt, or one dollar, of such as are approaching manhood. Our revenue for this year thus gathered amounts to one green, one blue, and ninety-four white blankets, one pair of white trousers, one dressed elk skin, seventeen shirts, and seven dollars. The half of this property I propose to divide among the three chiefs who are with us, in recognition of stated services, which they will be required

to render to the settlement, and the other half to spend in public works.

"As to our government; all disputes and difficulties are settled by myself and ten constables; but I occasionally call in the chiefs, and intend to do so more and more, and when they become sufficiently instructed, trustworthy and influential, I shall leave civil matters in their hands. I find the Indians very obedient, and comparatively easy to manage, since I allow no intoxicating drinks to come into our village. Though we are continually hearing of the drunken festivals of the surrounding tribes, I am happy to tell you that Metlakahla has not yet witnessed a case of drunkenness since we have settled here—a period of ten months. Still, not all with me are true men. Some few, on their visits to Fort Simpson, have fallen, and two, whose cases were clearly proved and admitted of no extenuation, I have banished from our midst.

"On Sabbath days labor is laid aside, a solemn quiet presides, and the best clothing is in use. Scarcely a soul remains away from divine service, excepting the sick and their nurses. Evening family devotions are common to almost every home, and, better than all, I have a hope that many have experienced a real change of heart. To God be all the praise and glory.

"We have succeeded in erecting a strong and useful building, capable of containing at least six hundred people, which we use as church and school. We held our first meeting in this building on the night it was finished, the twentieth of December last. I have about one hundred children who attend morning and afternoon, and about one hundred adults (often more) in the evening. I occupy the principal part of the time in the adult school, in giving simple lectures on Geog-

raphy, Astronomy, Natural History, and Morals. These lectures the Indians greatly prize.

One of the most remarkable and wonderful conversions was that of Legaic, chief of all the chiefs. He was known for hundreds of miles as the fiercest, most blood-thirsty of all the Indians. He soon hated Mr. Duncan with all the fervor of his intense nature, for he saw that as Mr. Duncan's power grew, his waned. He publicly boasted that he himself would kill Mr. Duncan. At one time he went to the school house (while still in Fort Simpson) with seven or eight followers, when Mr. Duncan was alone. Mr. Duncan's absolute lack of fear and Clah's opportune arrival saved his life. Another time Mr. Duncan told me he was about to visit a sick woman when an Indian warned him that Legaic was waiting to shoot him as he passed his house. Mr. Duncan was not to be dissuaded. He had to walk down a lane, at the far end of which stood the chief's house. The lane there turned at right angles. Mr. Duncan said he walked leisurely down the lane with all outward indifference, but expecting every moment to feel the bullet in his heart. Though he saw the chief's door open a very little and could see that some one stood near the door, yet there was no shot. When he made the turning and his back was exposed he felt sure the man would shoot, but still he hurried not a step. While attending the sick woman, the wife of Legaic came in and watched his every move and expression, searching his face, he knew, for some trace of fear.

Mr. Duncan paid no heed to her. He rather dreaded the return walk, yet he made it without sign of haste or fear, and as a result the Indian was so impressed that he felt Mr. Duncan was indeed a great "Shimaugot" and could not and did not harm him. This man, Legaic,

who had shot or killed more men than he could count, who had committed all kinds of atrocities, even he felt the magic of the new life and became in time "Mr. Duncan's Grand Vizier," and for seven years was a leader in the colony. All this at the cost of his great wealth and his Chieftaincy.

For many years all was well with the little colony and the progress of these natives towards a higher life was so rapid that it can be likened only to the marvelous growth of plant life in the northern regions of Alaska during the long days when there is no night.

For many years the sailing was smooth for this little ship of state so courageously stemming the current of heathenism. At least there was no adverse wind from other quarters. Suddenly there arose a storm from a region whence trouble would least be expected. Early in the eighties a missionary Bishop was appointed to oversee the work at Metlakatla and British Columbia. Soon after his arrival he decided that there should be changes in the methods of work. Also that the Indians should conform more closely to the ritual and ceremonies of the English Church; that the Lord's Supper should be instituted with the use of real wine. Mr. Duncan objected to all these changes, for he knew that the natives would soon forget the spirit because of the form. Moreover he knew the natives' fondness for intoxicants and felt it would be wrong to use such wine in the communion service, especially since the law of Canada forbade an Indian touching liquor under any circumstances.)

The Bishop insisted, but Mr. Duncan would not yield. Mr. Duncan can never yields as long as he knows he is right, and in this instance he was confident and firm in his stand. It was a sad spectacle, this division among those preaching love, peace, and concord. Neither man

would yield or compromise. Mr. Duncan withdrew from the Church Missionary Society and started an Independent Native Church, and all but a few of the natives followed him. The Bishop claimed all the church and mission buildings and the land on which they stood. Much to the surprise of the natives and workers the Canadian Government sustained his claim.

Such conditions were impossible for the continuance of real mission work, and Mr. Duncan decided that his little flock must again seek a new home. A band of his followers were sent out to find a suitable place for a home. They paddled north till they found the island now called Annette, which they chose because of its beautiful harbor, fine water fall, and uncut forest. This island lay outside of English jurisdiction and Mr. Duncan immediately set out for Washington and made his plea to President Cleveland. There was no precedent to be guided by, but the cause of Indians was urged by such distinguished people as the Governor of Alaska, Sheldon Jackson, and Henry Ward Beecher, and after much consultation the Secretary of the Interior decided the Metlakathlans could settle on any unoccupied lands in Alaska.

Mr. Duncan hurried the good news to his waiting people and early in the year 1887 a small number set sail for the new home.

Upon Mr. Duncan's arrival some months later, a memorable service was held on the beach. A correspondent who was present thus describes the scene:

"The day was a perfect one and the visitors were at once put ashore. A more lovely place than this harbor it is impossible to imagine. It is semi-circular in shape, opening out through a number of small islands to the westward. On the east and north are wild, rugged

mountains, coming down to the water's edge, and on the south is a low, green shore skirted by a gravel beach that winds in and out in beautiful curves. The place was entirely uninhabited, except by thirty or forty of the men from Metlakatla with their families, who had come on as an advance guard. The remainder, in all about one thousand people—men, women and children—will come on as soon as provisions can be made for them and the means of transportation shall arrive.

"The exercises were impromptu and Mr. Duncan first addressed the people in their native tongue. He told them of his trip to the United States and then introduced Hon. N. H. R. Dawson, the United States Commissioner of Education. The natives sang "Rock of Ages," and Daniel Ne-ash-kum-ack-kem replied to Mr. Dawson's address in a short speech as follows:

"Chiefs, I have a few words of truth to let you know what our hearts are saying. The God of heaven is looking at our doings today. You have stretched out your hands to the Tsimpsians. Your act is a Christian act. We have long been knocking at the door of another government for justice, but the door has been closed against us. You have risen up and opened the door to us, and bid us welcome to this beautiful spot, upon which we propose to erect our homes. What can our hearts say to this but that we are thankful and happy? The work of the Christian is never lost. Your work will not be lost to you. * * * Our hearts, though often troubled, have not fainted. We have trusted in God and He has helped us. We again salute from our hearts. I have no more to say."

During the summer and autumn many of the remainder followed. Mr. Duncan drew careful plans for the new town. The streets were so laid out that each man had a corner lot. The beautiful church, so

fittingly called the Westminster of Alaska, was begun and after several years work was finished, having been built and furnished by the natives. Stores, a cannery, and a sawmill were soon in running order. Indeed, it was soon again a model village, such as it would be difficult to find even in our best states. No liquor or tobacco was allowed or is today allowed to be sold on the island. There has not been a single case of bloodshed in the village for twenty years. It is a rare occurrence to hear a profane word among the people. The Sabbath is really kept by this little community. The church bell begins to ring about eleven and rings continuously for at least fifteen minutes and every man, woman, and child able to walk attends the service. The entire service is conducted in the Tsimpsian language, with the exception of one song and one short prayer. The familiar hymns which Mr. Duncan has translated are remarkably beautiful in the Tsimpsian, for it is a liquid flowing language pleasing to the ear, in this respect a marked contrast to the rumbling guttural, words which seem to jerk themselves with difficulty from the throat of the Thlinget. There is Sabbath School in the afternoon. Mr. Duncan himself teaches the children, while the natives carry on the adult school by themselves. There is also an evening and mid-week service.

The cannery has been and is carried on under Mr. Duncan's direct supervision by the natives. The cannery, sawmill and stores have been, until the last few years, owned by the Metlakahla Industrial Company, but at present Mr. Duncan is the owner of all but a small part owned by a half-dozen of the older natives.

There are now four stores owned by the natives, 129 dwelling houses, many of them quite imposing, two steamers, four gasoline

launches, 67 Columbia River sailboats, one piano and 26 organs on the island.

One of the peculiarities of Mr. Duncan's work is his continuous use of the native tongue. He uses it in all his dealings with the people. This has brought about a rather unusual state of affairs. The third generation is now growing up under his care, and the oldest men and women, those who attended his school in the early days when he carefully taught them English, speak fairly good English, while most of the children cannot speak it at all. Because of this the progressive ambitious families send their children to Sika to be educated.

Mr. Duncan's eccentric ideas of architecture are evident in his huge octagonal Guest House, the twelve-gabled Town Hall, and the four-gabled School House. The last is a large square room with a long additional room protruding from each of its sides. The main room is used for a school room, as the attendance now is not over fifty. In the center of the room is a low brick platform about seven feet square. Some six feet above it hangs a huge funnel with a mouth six feet square, tapering to a smokestack thirty feet high. On this platform a blazing fire is built and those who keep close enough keep warm, while the strong draft up the funnel draws out all smoke, impure air, and odors (unless the wind is wrong.) These people, because of cleanly habits and a varied food are remarkably free from the odor so marked in all other Alaska Indians. This fireplace was built after the plan of the fireplace in use among the natives in the early days and Mr. Duncan claims it is far superior to stoves for ventilation. The native's idea of the use of windows and doors was revealed when Mr. Duncan rebuked a man for not opening his windows and doors and ventilating his house. Mr. Duncan told me the native replied: "Why should I open

my windows? They are to see through. I can see through glass. Why should I open my door? I open it when I go out or come in."

The seats are arranged so that all the children have their backs to the fire and each division faces one of the four walls on which are hung blackboards. This was done so that the classes might be as separate as possible and all still be under his eye. Mr. Duncan has always done his own teaching except for an occasional teacher for a short time. At present the school is taught by a very pretty native girl whose father, David Leask, was for many years a missionary and helper, his strain of white blood enabling him to do exceptionally good work. Another daughter, Mrs. Gamble, is the wife of one of the ablest teachers in the Sitka Training School and has herself been a teacher there.

In the days of Old Metlakahla Mr. Duncan went to England to learn weaving and rope making and to get the necessary apparatus and materials so that he might teach his people. Last summer I found a shawl or two beautifully woven that these native women had made in those days. They do none of it now.

While in England, Mr. Duncan secured some twenty instruments for a band. The Tsimpeans proved themselves adepts in music and for a number of years the Metlakahla band was well known even around Puget Sound. Now the band is scattered, the men being drawn to Ketchikan and the various canneries by better pay and a desire to see the world outside.

Benjamin Haldane is probably the ablest man on the island. He is Mr. Duncan's trusty man in the store. He is the photographer of the village. Also the best musician, for he plays the pipe organ in the church, plays the piano in a creditable way, reads at sight any music

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that does not need unusual technique, plays cornet, trombone and violin, was leader of the band and is now choir director. This, without even one lesson from a teacher.

A few of the original colony are still left. John Tait, the much-loved, genial, big-hearted, smiling John Tait, is now quite an old man, but still clerks in the store. Mrs. Marsden, familiarly known as Catherine, one of the first girls to be trained, and one of the few women who could really be an efficient helper, is still living. She is the mother of the Rev. Edward Marsden, a graduate of Lane Theological Seminary, and well known in the East. He is now in charge of a mission station at Saxman, near Ketchikan.

And Mr. Duncan, the leader, and guide in all things spiritual and temporal, though he is seventy-six years old and has weathered hardships such as few men have met, yet is hale, hearty and ruddy-faced; active, energetic, and an indefatigable worker. He has never married, but his home is made homelike and cheery by Mrs. Wallace, who has been his housekeeper for eight years. Mr. Wallace is Mr. Duncan's all-round assistant. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace are cultured and capable and have done much to make Mr. Duncan's life pleasant and to help along his good work.

Such work as Mr. Duncan's needs no eulogy. It speaks for itself. But a man so gifted must needs accomplish things wherever he chooses to work. He is a clear, rapid thinker; he is possessed of an extraordinary memory and an indomitable will; he is a fluent speaker and a good conversationalist; he is a magnetic, dominating personality even today. He may have made mistakes, but his successes far outnumber and outweigh any blunders he may have made. His coming and life here means that several thousands of filthy, blood-thirsty, Indians have



been changed to clean, law-abiding citizens; that other thousands are at least semi-decent, and never dangerous. His life means that thousands have been happier and better men and women, and no greater praise could be bestowed on any man, and no greater work could he do.

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